Fulbright Drafts Questions for Rusk On Commitments

By Chalmers M. Roberts 8/2/67
Washington Post Staff Writer

The chairma nof the Senate Foreign Relations Committee is now drawing up a diplomatic catechism for the Secretary of State designed to define the United States' "national commitments" around the globe.

The central question Sen. J. William Fulbright (D-Ark.) will put to Dean Rusk will go like this:

What countries can be expected at some future time to ask the United States for economic or military help o nthe basis of such non-treaty statements as joint communiques, the remarks of a Vice President, private consultations and press conference statements by a President or Secretary of State?

A second and related question will concern the extent to which the 42 nations with which the United States has bilateral or multilateral treaty arrangements can call for aid, including the separability of the multilateral treaties.

Treaty Obligations

For instance, can a Latin American nation ask for help because it is a signatory to the Rio Treaty without the treaty being invoked, just as aid is now being given to South Vietnam and Thailand without the invocation of the entire SEATO Treaty structure?

And is there an American commitment to maintain the territorial integrity of the Arab nations — or Israel — and if so, which Arab nations?

Fulbright's questionnaire for Rusk will be coupled with a request that the Secretary be prepared to answer in full and in public before the committee in September hearings.

The committee touched on the subject of national commitments yesterday during a closed-door confirmation hearing for Leonard Unger, the new American ambassador to Thailand.

Fulbright got Unger, a former envoy to Laos, to promise to write a letter saying how far the United States must go to carry out its commitments to Thailand, Laos and South Vietnam. Then the committee voted approval of his nomination, which now will go before the Senate. (Also approved was the nomination of Sheldon B. Vance to be ambassador to Chad.)

Russell Alarmed

Fulbright had been mulling over the problem of how to get at the commitment issue when he discovered that Chairman Richard B. Russell (D-Ga.) of the Armed Services Committee was greatly disturbed by the Administration's decision to send three planes to the Congo. Fulbright then proposed that Russell introduce a resolution for hearings on American commitments.

Russell demurred but agreed to speak up in support of Fulbright if he did so. When Fulbright brought his resolution to the Senate floor on Monday Russell was the first to back him up.

Rusk himself provided anot

Rusk himself provided another motivation for Fulbright. The Secretary told another Senate committee a year ago that "no would-be aggressor should suppose that in the absence of a defense treaty, Congressional declaration or U.S. military presence grants immunity to aggression."

That statement, Fulbright said recently warns Congress that "regardless of any action or inaction, approval or disapproval, of any foreign commt ment on the part of the Congress, the Executive would ac as it saw fit in response to any occurrence abroad which i judged to be an act of aggression."

Now Rusk is being asked tc spell out in detail just how far and where the United States is, in fact, already committed around the world.